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ABSTRACT

Current state and federally funded educational programs seem to focus on four major themes: remediation, curriculum innovations, correcting racial imbalance, and compensatory education. Compensatory education refers to education programs which are designed to make up for deficiencies in a child's home environment. The ghetto child will never have a meaningful school experience unless the onus of his failure to learn is removed from his mode of life, his economic condition, and his lack of motivation. It is hypothesized that school failure in urban ghetto neighborhoods need not be attributed to the fact of de facto segregated schools or to our failure to understand the perceptual or cognitive style of a particular subculture. Ghetto children can learn equally well in all-black schools as in integrated schools. Many of the large city public school systems already have non-white enrollments which make up more than 50 percent of the entire student body. Programs designed to improve education in de facto segregated schools must aim at increasing the frequency of success and the heightening of levels of aspiration of each child. Both white and black children, separately or together, can learn in neighborhood schools which ideally would be developed as community schools. (Author/JM)

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COMPENSATING, REMEDIATING, INNOVATING AND INTEGRATING

Illusions of Educating the Poor

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Introduction

Knowledge is increasing so fast, a recent ad said, that the problem of education is to find better ways to "pack it into young heads." This popular belief is wrong and causes much of what is wrong with our schools. For years, it is true, learned men used their brains to store and retrieve information. Today, the child who has been taught in school to stuff his head with facts, recipes, this-is-how-you-do-it, is obsolete even before he leaves the building. Anything he can do, or be taught to do, a machine can do, and soon will do better and cheaper.

What children need, even just to make a living, are qualities that can never be trained into a machine -- inventiveness, flexibility, resourcefulness, curiosity, and, above all, judgment.

The chief products of schooling these days are not these qualities, nor even the knowledge and skills they try to produce, but stupidity, ignorance, incompetence, self-contempt, alienation, apathy, powerlessness, resentment, and rage. We can't afford such products any longer. The purpose of education can no longer be to turn out people who know a few facts, a few skills, and who will always believe and do what they are told. We need big changes and in a hurry.*

-- John Holt

The U.S. Riot Commission Report in 1968 wanred that, "Without major changes in educational practices, greater expenditures on existing elementary schools serving disadvantaged neighborhoods will not significantly improve the quality of education."

Now, four years later, with some eight billion dollars of federal money invested in the education of the poor as well as several significant federal in-

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*"Why We Need New Schooling," Look, Jan. 13, 1970.

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junctions forcing integration, are we any further along in the education of the so-called "disadvantaged?"

The evidence appears to be overwhelmingly in favor of the supposition that compensatory education is a failure.

-- The school systems of almost every large metropolitan city in the country already have a majority of black (and other minority group) public school students, or are moving in this direction.

-- The Skelly Wright Decision, hailed by progressives as a landmark for integration in Washington, D.C., is probably the most important reason why the District's school system is 95 per cent, approaching 100 per cent, black.

-- Virtually every large city school system has experienced a decline in reading scores for four years in a row.

-- Of the 244 compensatory education programs reviewed in 1966 by E.W. Gordon and D.A. Wilkerson, hardly more than a handful were still in existence in 1971, according to a status report by Adelaide Jablonsky.(4)

-- The following are headlines which appeared in late 1971 from the New York Times:

SCHOOLS, NOT PUPILS, ARE FOUND AT FAULT IN READING FAILURES (October 29)

CHICAGO REPORTS SEGREGATION IS UP (November 28)

SURVEY SAYS SCHOOL MORALE IS ERODING (October 19)

O.E.O. ADMITS FAILURE IN TESTS OF COMPANY LEARNING PROGRAMS (February 1, 1972)

The best way to waste these billions earmarked for education if disadvantaged children is to expand existing services and practices such as:

-- Hiring more remedial reading teachers, guidance counselors, psychologists and social workers.

-- Increasing and even mandating sensitivity training and human relations workshops.

-- Continuing the practice of introducing and abandoning at least one new reading, math or science program each year with plans next year to escalate to introduction and abandonment of two new entirely innovative courses of study designed especially for disadvantaged children.

-- Continuing and accelerating the "real" teaching of children who haven't learned much during the school day in after school programs.

-- Using whatever small amount of funds allocated for research to evaluate programs in operation less than a few months or about to be abandoned. (Under no circumstances should federal money be used for serious long-range studies.)

-- Quieting the "black" agitation by ordering a packaged $1,000 library of the forgotten books of Negro history.

-- Introducing aides and paraprofessionals into the school without training, purpose, or opportunity for advancement.

-- Arranging for the big money to go for consultants (university professors), conferences and workshops on every conceivable topic - except that no money should go to in-service courses for classroom teachers on how to teach basic reading and arithmetic to children who have not learned it by the end of the first grade.

Current state and federally funded educational programs seem to focus on four major themes: remediation, curriculum innovations, correcting racial imbalance, and compensatory education. Compensatory education refers to educational programs which are designed to make up for deficiencies in a child's home environment. I believe that we will never provide a meaningful school experience for the ghetto child until we stop placing the onus of his failure to learn on his mode of life, his economic condition, his lack of motivation. My hypothesis is that school failure in urban ghetto neighborhoods need not be attributed to the fact of de facto segregated schools or to our failure to understand the perceptual or cognitive style of a particular subculture. Ghetto children can learn equally well in all-black schools as in integrated schools. In fact, we might learn something

if we studied the few all-black Southern public and private high schools of the 1920's which, despite terrible circumstances, seem to have graduated the majority of the black intellectual elite who are now in their 60's.

Compensation: False Assumptions

Schools first assume that the disadvantaged child (in fact, any child who isn't learning) has a short attention span and poor auditory acuity, yet the short attention span is often a child's response to boredom and frustration. The same youngsters who appear hyperactive or unmotivated in the classroom stand at a pin-ball machine for hours and practice football long after dark.

If school is so unpleasant for disadvantaged youngsters, why don't we liven it up? Make it fascinating, engaging, challenging, and enjoyable?

Because (1) before getting to the interesting stuff, the child must first learn the "simple basics," (2) minority groups can't handle "abstract" material and must therefore learn "concrete" material "relevant" to their way of life, (3) educators must not waste time on "irrelevant" material since there is so much "basic" information which must be drilled in, (4) we must wait until the child is "ready."

(1 and 2) There is little evidence that learning progresses directly from the simple and "concrete" to the complex and "abstract." The notion that minority groups can't handle "abstractions" guarantees "stupidity." Speech, which is ordinarily grasped well before a child enters school, is one of the most abstract areas of learning perception. Yet, we don't first drill him in consonants and vowels. Rather, he expresses a concept with a rough approximation of the sound of the word first, later he refines this sound and, later yet, he is able to break the sound down into its component sounds. Learning doesn't start at the "bottom," it starts in the "middle."

(2 and 3) It's just those "irrelevant" things belonging to the imagination that excite and arouse children. Imagination can be one of the most potent allies

in learning -- provided it is nourished (or at least not stifled). It can be used to teach improvisation, self-reliance, creativity. A child allowed freedom of imagination jumps at the opportunity to have fun -- to express and put substance to his wishes, desires, impulses and feelings. Innocent imaginations fuel effort and productivity like few other things. Children caught up in their imaginative exploits are excited, interested, and motivated -- in what <u>they</u> are <u>doing</u>. The so-called academic tools they will need in the adult world -- literacy and "numeracy" -- are absorbed along the way by children who find the images and ideas provided by reading and arithmetic exciting, who want to know what Horton will do about the Who (but who could care less about "See Dick run," whether or not Dick is black and urban). (Of course some of the new educational material is good. But is has little impact in schools that suffer from poor leadership and demoralized teachers. In fact, one index of a "bankrupt" school is a stockroom loaded with new materials that will never be used.)

Certainly part of life is coping with relevance and boredom. But children should be exposed to such experiences only in small doses. Certainly, some routines are good, but not too many, and only those designed for relatively unimportant areas of life. Yes, some exercises are necessary, but don't expect children to enjoy them. Drills are boring.

(4) Just what is "readiness" anyway? I know many boys who weren't "ready" to learn the multiplication tables until they got a paper route (or started playing poker), who could not be cajoled or browbeaten to add a row of figures and come up with the right answer until they stood to lose money if they didn't. Certainly, most kids are not "ready" to learn calculus in the third grade. But in the <u>meantime</u> we could talk about spaceships and, incidentally, Newton's laws of motion and gravitation. The point is that, if he is treated properly from the start, the child is continuously ready to learn.

Another factor must be recognized. Very often there is a conflict between the teacher's values and the child's, between those of the school and those of the surrounding neighborhood. Hard work, a delay in reward and gratification, an emphasis on obedience and intellectual achievement -- these may often be at odds with a child's personal ambitions. Teachers must be brought to recognize that the values of the school are goals rather than prerequisites for learning.

The disruptive child is the focus of still another misconception. Though ghetto teachers and administrators are almost unanimous in criticizing the roles of psychologists, social workers, and remediators, educators still define the problem as not enough services. New models, not more, are needed.

Teachers can usually identify maladjusted children in the elementary grades; subsequent tests and interviews confirm their opinions. Classrooms burst with behavioral and learning problems that teachers don't know how to handle. The school has concentrated on diagnosis and, instead of devoting its energies to creating a climate that fosters mental health, has relied on guidance clinics and other outside agencies to change the child. Unfortunately, existing social agencies, geared to service intact, white, middle-class families, have not kept pace with rising social disintegration in the inner city.

Remediation: Exercises in Futility

Generally, the school has used mental health specialists ineffectively. The main leverage applied for intervention in crises has been remedial. In the case of learning disabilities, children are usually two years below grade level in achievement before referral. By that time many have become behavior problems, and it is difficult to sort out diagnostically which direction intervention should take.

The processes which determine an individual's mental and scholastic growth are established during the early, formative years. As Benjamin Bloom[1] has suggested, the loss of intellectual development during this period may never be

recovered. Hence, intervention should take place during early childhood, to involve the students in education by inseparably binding competence and achievement to feelings of well-being and constructive behavior. At the same time, early intervention should provide the tool skills of reading and arithmetic, thus negating "cumulative deficit," by which youngsters fall further and further below national scholastic norms with every passing year.

A shocking percentage of children from urban ghettoes reach junior high school with the reading and writing skills of fourth graders. In effect they are illiterate. Their handicap will not only severely limit future educational and vocational opportunities but will make many everyday activities difficult. Despite the current emphasis on reading, the U.S. Office of Education reports that 24 million adults 18 years of age and older can't read beyond a fourth grade level, and an estimated eight to 12 million school-age children have such serious reading problems that they are headed toward the same functional illiteracy.(5)

Recent years have seen a proliferation of methods for teaching reading. Yet the academic gap remains between ghetto and middle-class students. A survey of 1400 sophomores entering an all-black high school in a large Northern city revealed that less than a fifth could read at grade level. Nearly a third were functional illiterates. These statistics, reinforced by others equally grim, appear standard rather than exceptional in most urban centers. For example, in New York City, the reading ability of public school pupils fell back two months during the 1968-69 school year. One-fourth, or nearly 135,000 pupils, were two years below their grade level. The previous year, one-fifth of those tested were two years behind.(6) In Philadelphia, two out of five public school pupils perform "below minimum functioning levels," according to the latest standardized tests. "Minimum functioning levels" are defined by the tests' publishers as levels sufficient to cope with basic instructional materials, such as basal readers and textbooks.(10)

A big remediation push in a school invariably results in some overall improve-

ment. Yet careful analysis reveals that those who already know how to read improve while those who don't remain as they were.

Again, there is no impressive evidence that children learn better, or learn at all, when their educational environment is highly structured and free from "extraneous" stimulation. In fact, isolating, programed routines reinforce dependency and feelings of inferiority. But somehow we find a simpler solution disconcerting. If a child is blocked in reading, we should not give him more reading; instead we should teach him swimming, photography, or any other ego-enhancing activity. Similarly, I have seen whole fifth-grade classes of children who could no longer be taught even simple arithmetic, but who grasped chess, checkers, or Monopoly.

It is futile to try to unblock a block with a block. If a kid has arrived at a point where he hates reading for 15 minutes, an hour of "remedial" reading will only make things worse. The fact is, he can't read because all his experiences with reading have been frustrating and humiliating. To put pressure on him to "catch up - or fail" usually means that he will fail. Sometimes it is better for us to lay off - if necessary, we should avoid teaching "reading" for a couple of years, until he has had success in learning and feels more secure and confident. Once motivated and unblocked, my experiences have shown that he can make rapid headway and achieve a level that theoretically is supposed to take much longer.(2,3)

We must acknowledge that relatively little statistical information has been compiled which would validate the assertion that success in learning one activity associated with school increases chances of success in learning other activities, also associated with school, including reading and arithmetic.

Although my own short experiences as an educator in predominantly black schools strongly suggest to me that this assumption is valid, so few public schools have tried the strategy of creative learning I have outlined, over any extended period, that there can be no appropriate statistics. However, the considerable support for

this view from educators and psychotherapists certainly would suggest that this strategy is worth trying.

In addition, educators hardly consider the patterns of behavior distinctive to specific stages of development and their effect on translating educational goals to classroom practices. For example, adolescents entering high school are antagonistic to adult expectation, confuse nonconformity with independence, and identify strongly with the concepts of "gang" and "team." Against this pattern, the schools become defensive. As a result, students spend their time trying to beat the system by cutting classes and cheating on exams. The school, in turn, talks about stiffening the curriculum and raising standards. For too many young people, high school is valueless in itself and important only in terms of the final result - the diploma.

The great objection to these suggestions is: What do we do about curriculum? How can we grade bowling and chess?

Grading and concomitant deadlines should be abolished during the early years and only introduced, if at all, gradually and gently as the child gets older.

That does not mean that we need to be "permissive" and reject discipline. However, there are only a few rules that it is urgent for children to obey even before they can omprehend them. Like other learning, ethics, values and morality are best when the individual has learned them for himself. Self-discipline is the best discipline. Naturally, self-discipline is something the child <u>gradually</u> teaches himself.

<u>Innovation: Curriculum Isn't Sacred</u>

"Innovative" curricula are one of the most frustrating educational fads. Typically, an "innovative" program is introduced into an inner city school, only to be abandoned, in reality if not publicly, before the year is out. In that period, a big chunk of grant money is spent but very little else is accomplished.

As Albert Shanker* puts it:

> Year after year, new programs are introduced in the schools - team teaching, ungraded schools, higher horizons, educational TV, computer assisted instruction, differentiated staffing, and so on, and on. To the public, the introduction of each program may signify an educational advance, but for the teacher the new program is more likely to be a replay of an old tune. The adoption of new programs and the abandonment of old ones can, by and large, be better understood in the light of the public relations needs of boards of education than of the educational needs of children. Small wonder, then, that teachers have become skeptical. The longer they teach, the wider - and more disillusioning - their experience with innovations. The "old ways" (last year's innovations) are always described in negative terms; the new programs are "doomed to succeed."
>
> Thus, school districts throughout the country are busy ousting their school superintendents (who have failed) and replacing them with new ones. In their hunt for new school superintendents and new school programs, school districts are engaged in a game of educational musical chairs in which each district hails as new and innovative that which is being discarded as a failure in a neighboring area.

In reality, it is the child - and the teacher - who should be (allowed to be) innovative - not the curriculum.

After all, teachers - 90% of them - want to teach. Whatever other hangups they may have, they want to teach. Many critics do not understand that the process of not teaching is as exhausting for teachers as the process of not learning is for the child. (Is it any wonder that after school programs are generally not useful to the children for whom they are intended? Exhausted by the process of non-learning during the school day, the child is unreasonably expected to "come alive" after school.) Teachers in ghetto areas are usually forced to teach under intolerable conditions. And they are powerless to effect changes in the schools where they work. Teachers are virtually unrepresented at all levels of educational planning, including federally supported projects for disadvantaged children.

The educational "think tanks" and the dozens of federally- and foundation-

*Excerpted from "Where We Stand - A Weekly Column of Comment on Public Education by Albert Shanker, President, United Federation of Teachers." The column appeared as a paid advertisement in the July 18, 1971 New York Times.

supported education panels rarely, if ever, include classroom teachers. Little wonder that not much, if anything, filters down to the classroom. Then, teachers are blamed and criticized for failing programs they had nothing to do with in the first place.

At the same time, however, teachers have not been vigorous enough in forging alliances with local community groups to effect change. Teachers have tolerated university programs that are not realistic in terms of the needs of teaching in ghetto schools, and they have let themselves be intimidated by boards of education into accepting programs that do not make any sense.

Integration: At What Price?

Integration of schools in the big cities -- where most of the population resides -- is not working. According to a 1971 survey by the Department of Health, Education and Welfare,[7] 17 large cities have a majority of black (and other minority group) public school students:

Chicago, 54.8 per cent; Detroit, 63.8; Philadelphia, 60.5; Baltimore, 67.1; Cleveland, 57.6; Memphis, 51.6; Washington, 94.6; St. Louis, 65.6; New Orleans, 69.5; Atlanta, 68.7; Newark, 72.2; Kansas City, 50.2; Oakland, 56.9; Birmingham, 54.6; Richmond, 64.2; Gary, 64.7; and Compton, Calif., 83 per cent. (According to a 1970 census by the New York City Board of Education, 57.2 per cent of public school students are black and Puerto Rican.[8])

Significantly, the HEW survey indicated that most of these cities showed an increase in black percentages from 1968. The whites are avoiding bussing, and fleeing to the suburbs.

According to the New York State 1972 Fleischmann Commission, ninety-three per cent of the state's public school pupils "are being educated in 676 school districts that are segregated" and that the state's schools are more segregated today than they were in 1954.[9]

No amount of bussing will significantly improve racial balance in cities where the majority of pupils are already black. At any rate, the "evidence" that forced integration can significantly improve the education of poor blacks is shaky, at best. The Coleman Report suggests that the differences between black ghetto schools and white suburban schools are not all that great and that integration should take care of these differences.

However, admitting that suburban schools are generally depressing, they are still tremendously more successful than ghetto schools. The differences are enormous. Most of the schools that would have indicated these differences were not considered by the analysts because 13 of the 15 largest cities refused to cooperate with the Coleman researchers.

Community Schools: An Opportunity

"Educational disadvantage," "lack of motivation" and all the other cliches are mostly due to the school's failure to instruct, rather than the child's failure to learn. Compensation, remediation, innovation and integration will continue to be futile until this fact is acted upon.

What poor children need are good schools - places where children are motivated to learn. Black youngsters from the ghetto are quite as capable as white youths from the suburbs of being motivated to learn - to learn to read and write, to use even "abstract" ideas, to become self-reliant.

In Washington, D.C., the Morgan School[11] has had a significant impact. As program analyst for the school, I concluded that at the fourth grade level, Morgan Community School pupils registered impressive gains in Reading and Math. For the first time in recent history, its fourth grade pupils are achieving at national norms and have among the best scores in the city. Thus, the pupils who started out with the Morgan Community Orientation in the first grade seem to have benefited greatly from the reading and math curriculum. (As has been noted else-

where, the Morgan School pupil population is relatively stable, and a large percentage of its fourth grade pupils were enrolled at the school from the beginning.)

The sixth grade reading and math scores present an inverse picture. Its scores in both areas are among the worst in the city. I have no explanation for the extreme and uneven performance. Obviously, it is a trend that must be watched, and the crucial tests would be in the next couple of years when most of those sixth graders will have completed a full six years in the Morgan Community School.

We can't be sure that community schools will be much more effective than centralized schools. Obviously, there is no guarantee that parents and teachers will adopt the ideal climate of learning I have suggested. Community schools are not a solution; they are an opportunity. However, whether parents do a good job or not, it is still necessary -- morally if for no other reason -- that they build a political power base within their communities and that they have a real stake in the education of their children.

After all, as the situation stands now, we see a system composed of entrenched school administrators and predominantly demoralized teachers. For the most part, those who are in charge of our inferior segregated schools of today have been in the same positions for the last ten or 20 years. They make up an "educational establishment," unanswerable to staff and community, which "meets its responsibilities" by instituting compensatory programs and by issuing pious pamphlets calling for integration and quality education. (What public educator outside isn't for integration these days?) When laymen have the temerity to call these career administrators to task, the only responses are stock excuses couched in the latest professional jargon: "cultural deprivation," "short attention span," "non-deferred gratification," etc. Only a handful of exceptional principals have successfully met the challenge and built a teaching school in the ghetto.

To quote Albert Shanker:*

> At the heart of the problem is the refusal of boards of education to be educationally accountable; that is, to open their doors to an honest evaluation of their educational programs. The clearest demonstration of this obstructive attitude was provided by no less than 13 of the 15 largest cities in the nation, when they refused access to their schools to U.S. government researchers working on what later came to be known as the Coleman Report. The reason, apparently, was that the officialdoms did not want their school districts compared with any others. It most instances, however, the cover-up process is not so obvious. Instead of outright refusal to permit evaluation of educational programs - a position they could not long maintain - the school boards have adopted the practice of hiring their own evaluators.
>
> In Gary, Indiana, for example, one public school has been operated in its entirety by a private company functioning under a performance contract. The program is a controversial one, and honest evaluation is essential; yet the evaluating agency was jointly selected by the private company whose financial future is at stake and the board of education whose political reputation hangs in the balance. Whether or not the evaluating agency does an honest job is somewhat beside the point since the method of selection must inevitably cast doubt on the validity of the results.
>
> Similarly, the New York City Board of Education, in its apparent eagerness to dump the More Effective Schools Program, employed as "independent" evaluator Dr. Bernard Donovan, former school superintendent with a seven-year public record of opposition to MES. In another area, it employed Preston Wilcox, an I.S. 201 militant, to evaluate the 201 "demonstration" project! Such actions are comparable to assigning George Wallace to do an independent evaluation of the progress of school desegregation.
>
> Public support for education is at ebb tide. Regaining public support will not be easy. A basic starting point might well be the readiness of boards of education to abandon the game of musical chairs and the pretense of self-serving reports and make way for honest, independent and unrestricted research. We badly need the equivalent of a Consumers Union for our public schools.

Decentralization would provide the setting for creating the community school. The current decentralized systems in New York, Detroit, St. Louis and some other

*Shanker, op. cit.

large cities provide an excellent opportunity for city planners and teachers to join forces with community groups to design neighborhood community schools in the context of urban renewal proposals. Planning, education and architecture schools could assist with such things as site selection, building design, classroom organization, educational technology, developing and publishing curriculum materials, creation of community services within the schools, creation of new types of classroom furniture, etc. The common objective would be the achievement of a setting which facilitates learning and offers a full range of services to the community. It would offer unlimited opportunities to engineers, architects, artists, functional design experts, publishers, writers, etc. However, the school - parents, teachers and administrators - would be in control.

The community school would serve all the people in a neighborhood. It would operate at some level twenty-four hours a day, all year round, and would include day care, recreation, health and welfare services, adult education and entertainment and community self-help services. It would be an exciting community focal point - something the community would have a stake in. We should redivert the enormous sums spent on compensatory programs and bussing into ghetto neighborhood schools that are so good that white parents would want to send their children to these black schools.

Conclusion

The proposals outlined here are directed toward the existing ghetto neighborhoods not because we have abandoned the principle of integration but rather because we must acknowledge our obligation toward the children who are now in the urban slum. We can no longer ignore the fact that many of our large city public school systems already have non-white enrollments which make up more than 50 per cent of the entire student body. While many of us consider eventual integration a necessary goal for our democratic society, the "black power" position makes a great deal of sense both

politically and in terms of the individual's self image.

Programs designed to improve education in de facto segregated schools must aim at increasing the frequency of success and the heightening of levels of aspiration of each child. Curriculum innovations along with the many compensatory techniques which have been employed in ghetto neighborhoods cannot, by themselves, bring looked-for results. It is my contention that white and black children, separately or together, can learn in neighborhood schools which ideally would be developed as community schools.

Decentralized schooling offers an opportunity to mobilize educators, planners and community residents for the purpose of upgrading education in their own decentralized school. Above all, it will make administrators accountable for what is happening in their institutions.

This is the challenge. Educators and city planners must take the initiative in forging hundreds of alliances with local community organizations and civil rights groups to achieve increased local autonomy and effect basic changes in the schools -- in every low-income, minority group neighborhood in this country.

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